All Dogs Go To Heaven
A KLINT VAN ZIEKS ZINE

All Dogs Go To Heaven: a Klint van Zieks Zine is an unofficial Ace Attorney fan project and is no way associated with Capcom or Shu Takumi.

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Foreword

THANK YOU for downloading All Dogs Go To Heaven, A Klint van Zieks fanzine! We've been wanting to honor our dearly departed prosecutor for a while and now we finally can! Please enjoy all the beautiful artwork and amazing stories that our contributors have made for this project. Please note that this zine does contain major spoilers for DGS/TGAA!! We recommend that you do not continue further in this zine unless you're okay with this.

This project also contains the following content that may be triggering:

> *Blood, death, mentions of murder, surrealism, implied period-typical racism, psychological manipulation/gaslighting, and disturbing imagery.*

Without further ado, we hope you enjoy this tribute to Klint van Zieks, gone but not forgotten.

All Dogs Go To Heaven Mod Team

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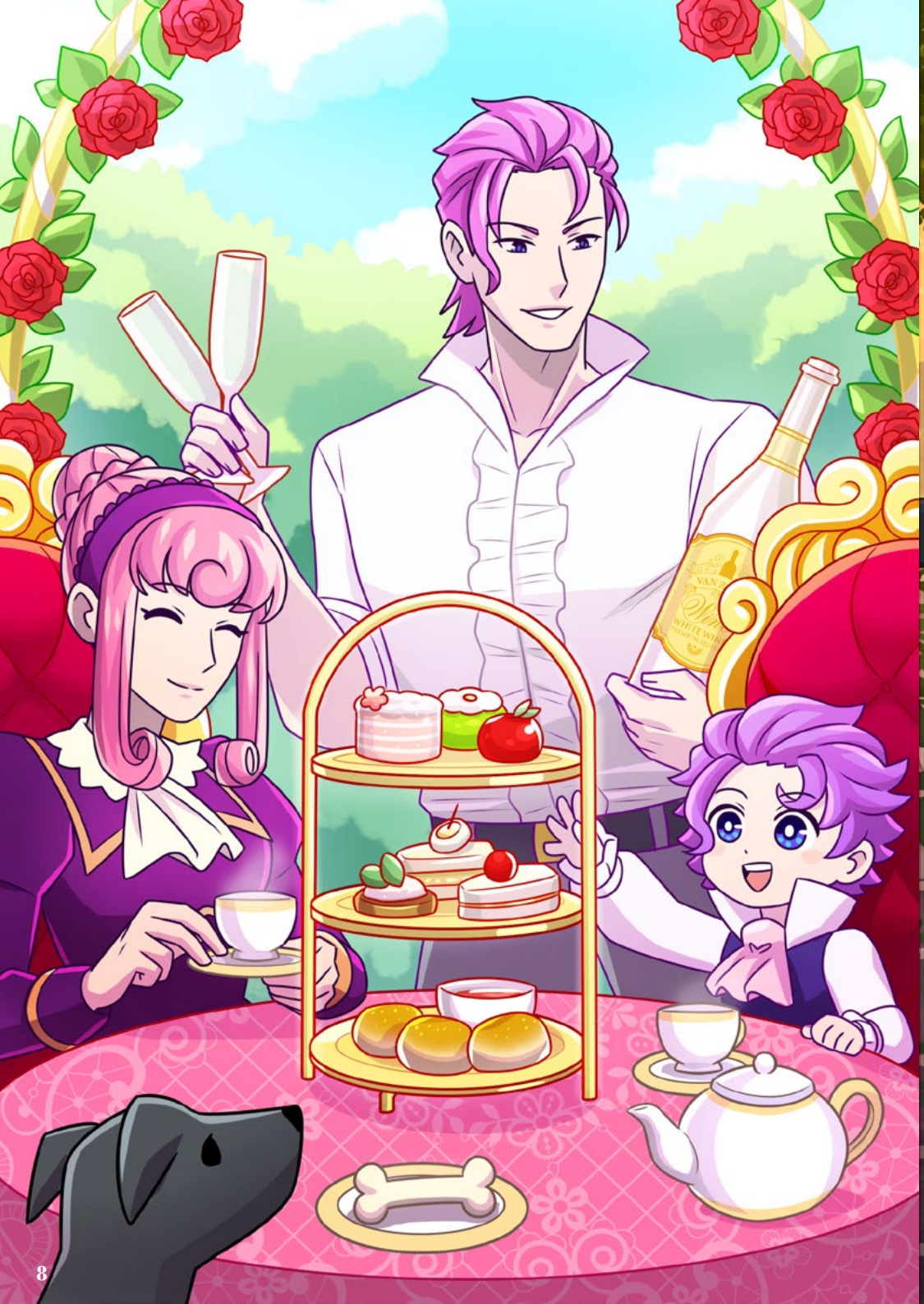


A Splash of Scarlet

Written by Jess
Illustrated by Squids

tags: alcohol consumption, awkward social situations
ships: Genshin Asougi/Klint van Zieks/Lady Baskerville

"WHERE THE BLAZES is that damned waistcoat?"

Genshin glanced over his shoulder to where Seishiro was sitting on the floor, a pile of clothes strewn about the man haphazardly. He sighed, walking over to Seishiro's bed and picking up a rather large waistcoat – black with simple gold detailing.

"Looking for this?" he asked, tossing it towards the man on the floor. "I'm surprised you didn't notice it earlier. You laid out your outfit for this event over a week ago."

Seishiro shook his head, his teeth gritted in frustration. "No, no, I bought myself a new one. I wear that black one practically everywhere, I think that people are beginning to notice. The one I'm looking for is a deep maroon colour. Help me look, will you?"

Genshin scoffed, shifting through Seishiro's upturned luggage with the toe of his boot. "You care too much about appearances, friend. You act as though every member of the British judiciary will shun you for wearing the same waistcoat twice."

"That's because *they will*!" Seishiro yelped, tossing another shirt over his shoulder. "I know that you don't particularly care about your position on this study tour, but *I* need to maintain a good reputation among our new British acquaintances. For God's sake, Genshin, the Director of Prosecutions is our host tonight! Some of the most influential figures of the British justice system will be attending!"

"I simply think that you worry too much."

It wasn't far from the truth. Seishiro had always been a bit of an attention seeker when it came to opportunities to climb the ladder. One might even call him a suck-up, if they were looking to be rude about it. Be it befriending a foreign nobleman or charming his way into an international study tour, the man was always prepared to do whatever it took to secure himself a favourable position. Genshin wasn't surprised to see that the behaviour extended across an entire ocean.

He pushed a pair of pants to the side, revealing a maroon waistcoat with black lining. He reached down to grab it, holding it out to Seishiro. "Is this what you were looking for?"

Seishiro snatched the waistcoat out of his hands. "*Perfect*. Now, I must ask that you leave me to finish dressing. And go put on one of your nicer outfits? Please? For my sake?"

"I know that you know I did not pack anything that could possibly fit your tastes, much less those of your esteemed companions."

"Then leave the sword at home, hmm? No matter what you're wearing, you always seem to look like a threat while carrying that thing."

Genshin's hand instinctively tightened around Karuma's hilt. "On second thought, give me one of your puffy neckties."

"It's called a cravat, you *nitwit*!"

The Van Zieks Estate was, in Genshin's humble opinion, one of the most ridiculously extravagant manors in all of London. Not that he had seen enough English manors to rank them, of course, but he felt that he was justified in his judgement. It was impossible to miss how luxurious everything was, from the dozens of perfectly trimmed roses leading the way down the path to the gleaming turrets that seemed to pierce the evening sky. Even the gravel under the carriage wheels seemed gentler, as if it didn't dare cause a bump in the road lest the passengers be jostled in their seats.

Genshin stared out the small window of the carriage, watching long strips of perfectly manicured lawn slowly pass them by. Seishiro sat across from him, fiddling with the cuff of his jacket sleeve. His toe tapped against the floor in a quick, rhythmic pattern, the man himself seemingly unaware of his nervous tick.

"Would you stop that? You're making me anxious."

The tapping stopped. Genshin watched out of the corner of his eye as Seishiro's hand – worrying away at his jacket cuff – instead reached up to tug at his beard.

"You *should* be anxious, you know. Everything is riding on our performance this evening. The people in that house could very well jumpstart our careers." Seishiro turned to glance out the window, swallowing heavily as he watched people mingle outside. "Or set them ablaze, if they wished."

"You'll drive yourself crazy before we even arrive," Genshin tutted, feeling the carriage roll to a stop. "Come on. I think I saw Yujin out there."

They stepped out of the carriage, dusting themselves off after the long ride. Many of Britain's elite stood on the steps leading up to the manor, draped in fine silks and glittering with even finer jewels. Genshin's eyes scanned over the crowd, catching on a shorter figure that he recognised almost immediately. He snapped his fingers in Seishiro's direction, pointing the man's attention to where Yujin Mikotoba stood speaking with a familiar English gentleman. Seishiro nodded, falling into step with Genshin as they made their way towards the pair.

Yujin's eyes widened with recognition as the two of them approached, a friendly smile settling on his face. He apologised to the man he was speaking with before turning to greet them both.

"Genshin, Seishiro, it's lovely to see you here! You both look wonderful." Yujin's eyes scanned over the two of them before landing on Karuma, nestled against Genshin's hip. Immediately, his eyes narrowed in apprehension. "Really, my friend? You couldn't have left her at home?"

Genshin stifled under his friend's gaze. He reached for Karuma, hoisting the sword up to display it properly. "You know that I don't travel anywhere without Karuma, Yujin. She is th—"

"—the guiding spirit of the Asogi clan, yes, yes, I understand." Yujin sighed, rubbing at his eyes exasperatedly. "Don't tell me I have to keep an eye out for *you* as well..."

"You sound as if you have an energetic child to babysit, Yujin. Has something happened since you moved out?" Upon Yujin's forlorn expression, Seishiro let out a hearty laugh, finally beginning to look more confident in himself now that he wasn't the only miserable person in the group.

Yujin shook his head. "Definitely not a child, no." He stretched to look beyond Seshiro, as if he were looking for someone in the crowd. He let out a long sigh. "No matter. In any case, I would like to formally introduce you both to my mentor, Doctor John H. Wilson."

Wilson bowed slightly at the introduction, offering his hand to both men in turn. "I'm so glad I can finally put names to faces. Doctor Mikotoba has told me all about the two of you."

"Only good things, I hope?" Seishiro joked, shaking his hand. Wilson chuckled.

"Of course, of course! Mikotoba here would never speak ill of anyone, much less close friends of his. His optimistic attitude has been a treat to have in the laboratory, especially compared to Doctor Stevens." He laughed, elbowing Yujin playfully. "The woman is an incredible forensic analyst, but she often frightens me half to death, I'm afraid."

Yujin nodded. "She is a highly qualified practitioner, and I am honoured t—"

"*MIKOTOBA*!"

Yujin's mouth snapped shut, eyes widening. Before Genshin could process what was happening, a flash of gold rushed past him, latching onto Yujin's shoulder. Before him appeared a tall young man – easily taller than Yujin – with a lively smile and a spark of mischief in his bright green eyes. The man began to tug at Yujin's sleeve.

"Mikotoba, there you are! I've been looking everywhere for you! You must come with me at once, the trays of food that the waitstaff are toting around are *magnificent*! I mean, really, *fried oysters*? When else are you going to have the chance to try—"

"Sholmes! There you are at last," Yujin interrupted with a huff of laughter, clasping a hand onto the man's shoulder. "I'm certain the oysters are fantastic, but before we get to that, I'd like to introduce you to the other two students from abroad, Seishiro Jigoku and Genshin Asogi. Friends, this is my flatmate, Herlock Sholmes."

Ah. So this was the new flatmate, Genshin thought to himself. Yujin had mentioned him in the past when Genshin had stopped by St. Synners to view his workplace. He knew that the man tended to keep Yujin busy with his amateur detective work and whatnot, but he had never expected someone so... energetic. The way Yujin spoke of him, it seemed like the man was a genius, not some sort of... oyster-crazed *maniac*. He suspected that Yujin had somewhat stretched the truth about their exploits together.

Sholmes cast a quick glance in their direction. "Yes, yes, you've told me all about Mr Samurai and The Judge To Be. Very lovely to meet you both, naturally. *Now*, Mikotoba, if you'd please?" The man seemed to dance his way around Yujin, placing both hands on the square of his back and pushing him towards the manor entrance. "Wonderful to see you again, Wilson! Please let Doctor Stevens know that I will be replacing the chemical instrument she lent me. It was an accident, *I swear*!"

And with that, the two men disappeared, leaving Seishiro, Genshin, and Wilson in stunned silence. After a moment, Wilson cleared his throat, turning towards the other two men with an awkward smile on his face.

"Well, I certainly could use a drink after that interaction. Care to join me, gentlemen?"

Despite what many people had claimed in the past, Genshin Asogi was not a wallflower – he simply didn't enjoy parties. He could be convinced to be sociable if absolutely necessary, of course, but there really wasn't much to be gained from such absurdly boring events. The oysters weren't even as marvellous as Sholmes had claimed.

After joining Wilson for a well-needed drink, Seishiro had abandoned the two of them, catching the eye of some important members of the judiciary. Genshin tried to hold polite conversation with Wilson, but after a few miserable minutes of agonising small talk, he had excused himself, grabbing another drink and planting himself firmly against the wall.

There he had been standing since then, watching minute by minute, hour by hour, as British nobility danced around each other, chortling and chuckling at mediocre humour and stuffy conversation. His only relief came from the steady hum of alcohol in his veins, brought along by the glasses of wine the servants had been passing around. He was not so drunk that he had lost control of his inhibitions, but it certainly kept him from impaling himself on his sword out of sheer boredom. He reached out as another servant passed him, grabbing a fresh glass of wine to sip on.

Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Seishiro, his head tossed back in a hearty laugh. He was speaking with a white-haired gentleman, obviously someone with influence. Seishiro continued to smile and joke with the man, but it seemed like he was almost as bored as Genshin was. Genshin smirked to himself as he watched the gentleman reach into his jacket and pull out a pocket watch, interrupting Seishiro mid-sentence. Served him right – they had been here long enough. He pushed himself off the wall and made his way toward his friend.

The room seemed to swirl as he strode through the crowd, pairs of dancers waltzing their way across the dance floor. He narrowly managed to avoid stepping on a noblewoman's toes, hopping over the train of her dress as she passed in front of him. The room was packed far too tightly – he felt like there was barely enough space to move through the throng of people.

That was the thought that flashed through his mind as he watched the tall gentleman step out in front of him.

Perhaps the wine had affected him more than he thought. He felt as if he wasn't in control of his body, his brain warning him of the impending danger just a second too late. He tried to stop himself, tried to keep himself from crashing face first into the man, but his body refused to respond.

Like a series of photographs taken in slow motion, Genshin watched as his wine sloshed out of his glass, splashing directly onto the chest of the man in front of him. Everyone around them went silent, conversations cut off mid-sentence as people turned to look at them. Maybe it was his imagination, but even the music seemed to stop.

The man stared down at himself, shocked into silence like the rest of the crowd. The entire front of his outfit was ruined – crisp white fabric painted with splotchy red stains. In his panic, Genshin noticed that his exterior jacket was almost the same colour as the wine. Thank God for small mercies. He opened his mouth to apologize, and—

"At least your jacket isn't ruined."

As soon as the words left his lips, he felt himself cringe. *What?*

The man snapped out of his haze, cocking a perfectly manicured eyebrow in Genshin's direction.

"What?"

Genshin blinked, suddenly overwhelmed. He could feel dozens of eyes piercing his skin, watching to see what he would do. Why was everyone looking at him? This didn't concern them.

"Your, um–" he pointed to the man's crimson coat. "Your jacket. It's red." He paused, as if this statement clearly explained everything. The man continued to stare at him.

"Your jacket is red. The wine is red." He glanced around the room, as if looking for a person who agreed with him. "It shouldn't be too difficult to clean. You can't even see the spill."

The entire room was filled with a deafening silence. Even outside the manor, it seemed like the animals had gone mute just to let the humiliation sink into Genshin's bones.

The man's eyes widened as he processed what Genshin had said. He huffed out a laugh.

Then, he started to chuckle.

As Genshin watched in amazement, he threw his head back in a roar of laughter, his hand moving to cover his heart as if he were worried it might give out suddenly. All around him, onlookers began to laugh as well, haughty English voices joining together into a choir of humiliation.

"What's so funny?" Genshin barked.

"Hah!" the man breathed, wiping a tear from his eye. A large, handsome smile practically split his face in half. He turned to the guests around him, raising his hands up to address them. "Please, do not trouble yourselves with this incident! As you were!"

As if under a spell, all of the partygoers turned back to their own private conversations, completely ignoring Genshin and the strange man once again. The laughter died down, replaced instead with the soft lull of the resuming music. The man turned back towards him, laughter twinkling in his ocean-blue eyes.

"I must say, my friend, you surprised me. Apologies if I made it seem like I was taunting you in some way. Very few people tend to speak so candidly with me, considering my station, so I found your words quite... *refreshing*."

Genshin quirked an eyebrow. "Your station? What exactly do you—"

"Klint? Has something happened, darling?" A woman emerged from the crowd, moving so fluidly that she seemed to float over the ground. She was beautiful, dainty and pale with ringlets of pink hair that were styled into an elaborate updo. She moved closer to the strange gentleman, placing a hand on his arm.

"Courtney was telling me that someone had tried to sabotage you. I didn't think anyone would be so rude as to assault a man at his own party."

The man – Klint, Genshin's mind supplied – simply laughed, taking her arm in his own. "Nothing so insidious, I'm afraid, Rose. Unless, of course, that wine spill was intentional?" He turned to wink at Genshin. "Many people in this room would pay good money to see me humiliated in such a way. I commend your efforts, in any case."

"Humiliated...?"

Oh. *Oh no.*

Klint.

As in Klint van Zieks.

As in Lord Klint van Zieks. Head of the Van Zieks family. Director of Prosecutions. One of the most powerful men in the British judiciary. He had just spilled wine on Klint van Zieks.

Oh, Seishiro was going to *kill* him.

Genshin felt himself fold into a deep bow. "I must apologise for my rudeness, I truly meant no disrespect—"

"No, no, don't start with the formalities now! Just when things were starting to get interesting!" Van Zieks waved him off, a charming smile gracing his features. "I have a distaste for anything absurdly formal or orthodox. Tradition is necessary in every culture, of course, but tiresome social rules lead to tiresome conversation. Don't you agree, Mister...?"

"Asogi. Genshin Asogi." He paused, thinking to himself. "... And yes. I do agree, actually."

"Asogi, hmm? I don't suppose you're one of the three exchange students here from Japan?"

Genshin nodded. “I am indeed.”

Van Zieks’ eyes sparkled with excitement. “I have heard tales from my colleagues about you and your friends. Hardworking foreigners, ready to commit your lives to the study of British law and order. It is inspirational, I must say, especially as someone who has committed his life to that very same—” he froze, his eyes widening in realisation. “I forgot to introduce myself. *Oh*, I’m such a *fool*!”

Genshin struggled to contain a snort. “My Lord, I can assure you—”

“No, no, no, this will not do! I may stand tall and preach about the absurdities of proper conversation, but even I am not rude enough to forget my manners.” He reached out to shake Genshin’s hand. “Lord Klint van Zieks. I serve as the Director of Prosecutions here in our great capital. And this,” he ushered the woman beside him forward, “is my lovely fiancée, Lady Rosalind Baskerville.”

Lady Baskerville curtsied. “A pleasure to meet you, Mr Asogi.”

“I can assure you, my Lady, the pleasure is all mine. I am quite lucky to be received by such a handsome and understanding young couple.”

“What a charming man!” she remarked, a soft blush settling on her features. “You must be careful, Mr Asogi. I’m not sure how quickly gossip spreads in Japan, but in England, people *love* to talk.”

Genshin smirked, taking her hand in his own. “In that case, we must give them something to talk about.” He brought his lips to the back of her hand, pressing a kiss to her skin. Her blush instantly reddened as Van Zieks barked out another laugh.

“Very cheeky of you, sir! Part of me feels like I should be offended, but like I said, I find your honesty quite invigorating. The stuffiness of everyday conversation in the upper classes might honestly—” he stopped mid-sentence, eyes narrowing as his gaze caught on Genshin’s waist. “*Is that a sword*?”

“Hmm? Oh!” Genshin reached down, pulling the sword off his waist. “The Great Karuma, my esteemed blade. The guiding spirit of my clan.” He unsheathed it slightly, letting the couple gaze at the shining silver blade.

“Remarkable...,” Van Zieks muttered to himself. “The condition is absolutely pristine. Is it ornamental?”

“Certainly not,” Genshin responded with a huff. “Karuma serves to cut down any obstacle that stands in my way. She is a tool of justice.”

“So, you spar, then?” Lady Baskerville piped up, looking absolutely elated. “Klint mentioned to me the other day that he was looking for a new sparring partner. No one seems to be able to keep up with him. It’s quite unfortunate, actually.”

“Now, Rose—”

Genshin quirked an eyebrow. “Really? I have a hard time believing that such a high and mighty individual like yourself would have trouble finding another swordsman of his calibre.”

Van Zieks sighed, shaking his head. “Not many people are as... *enthusiastic* about it as I am. I tend to scare away any interested parties.” He matched Genshin’s gaze, intensity flooding his eyes. “Outside of the law, swordplay is my greatest passion. I have practically dedicated my life to it.”

Genshin felt his stomach flip in excitement. “A quality we seem to share. I think I could easily be convinced to cross blades with you in the future, my Lord.”

“Really?” Genshin did not think that Van Zieks’ smile could grow any wider, but the man somehow proved him wrong. “Oh, how splendid! How soon can you—”

“Now, now, that is wonderful news, Klint, but you really *must* go and get yourself changed,” Lady Baskerville interrupted, resting a hand on Van Zieks’ chest. “I’m thankful that Mr Asogi was apologetic, but I’m afraid that dress shirt is unsalvageable.”

Van Zieks looked down at himself again, suddenly remembering his ruined clothes. “Ah. Yes, quite right, Rose. I’m afraid I must excuse myself.” He reached out again, taking Genshin’s hands in his own. “It was lovely to meet you, Mr Asogi. I look forward to our future endeavours together.”

“As do I. And I promise, I will not spill any wine on you next time.”

Van Zieks laughed again, a joyous sound that echoed in the large ballroom. “Only time will tell, I’m afraid. Please, enjoy the rest of the party.” He planted a kiss on Lady Baskerville’s cheek before disappearing into the crowd. Both Genshin and Lady Baskerville stood, watching him go.

“I am rather lucky, aren’t I?” she spoke, turning to Genshin with a soft smile on her face.

“I’d say that he is the lucky one, personally.”

She laughed, hiding her smile behind her hand. “You’re a bold one, Mr Asogi. What’s to be done about that?” She sighed, looking at where Van Zieks had disappeared to. “I think you’ll be a good influence on him, in any case. Too many people hide their true thoughts from him because of his status. I can tell that it wears on his conscience. He needs someone he can be truthful with.”

“... I hope that I can be of assistance, in that case.” He looked over her shoulder to where Seishiro was still standing, deep in discussion

with the Lord Chief Justice. He sighed. “I’m afraid I must take my leave.”

She frowned, disappointment evident in her expression. “You won’t stay?”

He shook his head. “I have caused too many incidents already tonight. Thank you for your hospitality and your kindness. The two of you have made quite the impression on me tonight.”

“As have you. Thank you for coming.” She stepped closer to him, raising up on her toes to lay a chaste kiss on his cheek. “I hope to see you again soon, Mr Asogi. I know Klint does as well. I hope you have a pleasant rest of your evening.”

“Good night, my Lady.”

“Genshin! Where are you going?” Yujin raced after Genshin, nearly tripping over his own feet as they descended the steps to the manor. “Are you leaving already?”

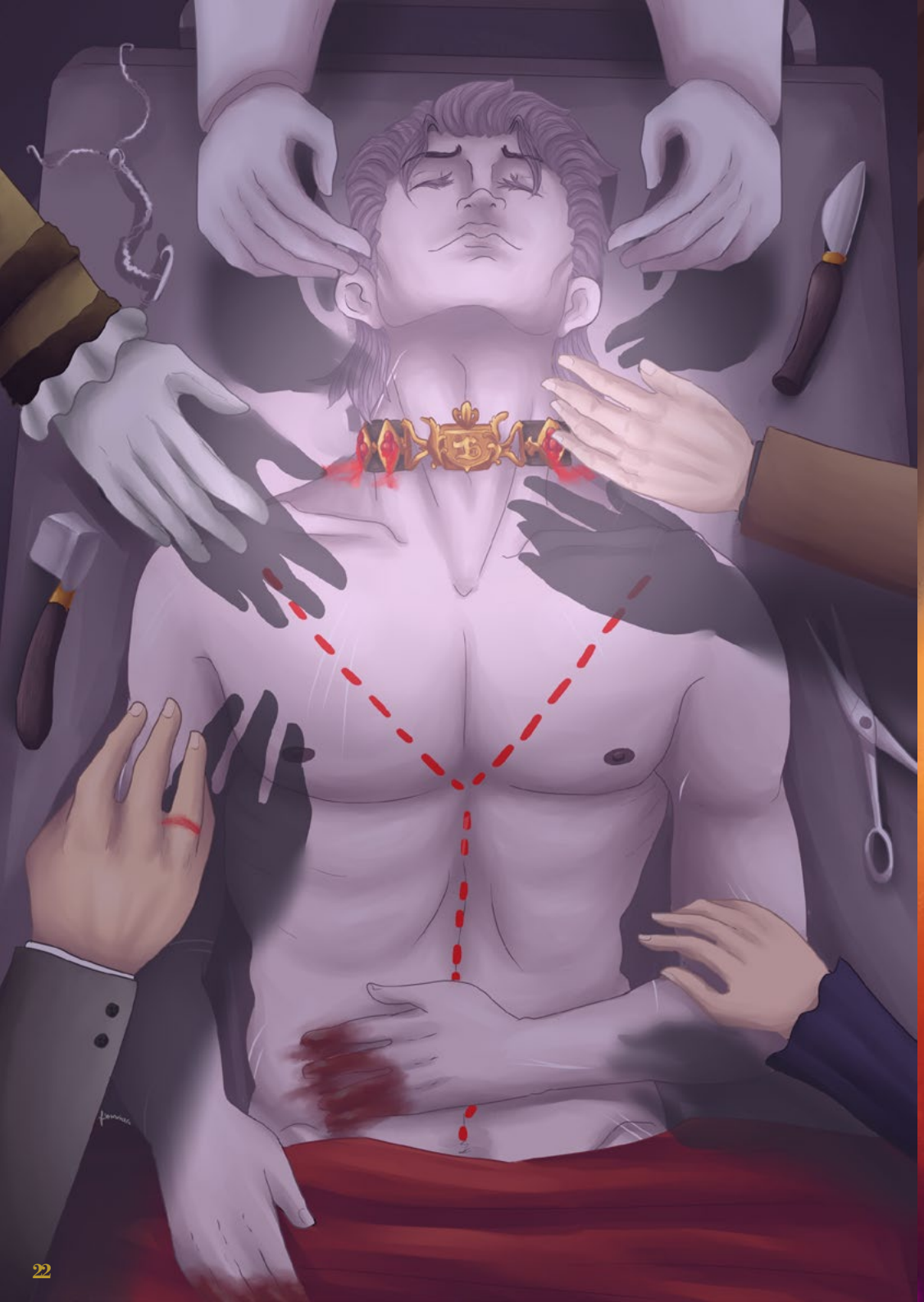
“I’ve outstayed my welcome. Plus, I’m tired. And probably drunk, if I’m being completely honest.”

“But Lord van Zieks was about to make his toast! I figured you and Seishiro would want to meet the man, seeing as you’ll probably be working together.”

Genshin laughed, running a hand through his hair. “Lord van Zieks, huh? There’s no need.” He turned back to look at the manor, a soft smile settling on his face.

“What a *fascinating* man.”

The End



Elementary, My Dear Prosecutor

Written by Caffeinatic
Illustrated by Donnie

tags: murder, home invasions

"UNPLEASANT BUSINESS, ISN'T IT?"

Klint is never sure how to break the solemn silence of a murder scene, but he knows that stewing in discomfort is worse.

At his side, Asogi nods soberly. "And you say you knew him, Prosecutor van Zieks?"

"By association, yes." A crime scene is unpleasant business regardless, but there's a heaviness in Klint's chest when he sees someone he knows meet this end. He doesn't envy the servants who found the man this morning in a pool of his own blood on the drawing room floor. "Dr Limburger. He worked at St. Synner's, I believe."

"Indeed, he did."

The voice startles them both; they turn to find a man smiling at them pleasantly.

"He's my colleague there," the man continues, then amends, "Well. *Was*, I'm sorry to say."

"Who the devil—?" Klint starts, just as Asogi asks, "Yujin?"

"I do apologise for the interruption, gentlemen," Mikotoba – one of Asogi's compatriots, if Klint recalls correctly – says with a polite nod. "You see, we were just finishing our own investigation."

"... *We*?"

Even as he asks, Klint feels a sinking sense of apprehension. His fears are fully realised when he sees a familiar blond head poke through the open doorway. It's the face that plagues his colleagues at Scotland Yard more than any other.

"My dear fellow, we really ought to be – ah! Inspector Asogi. *And* Lord van Zieks? I see London has sent their finest legal minds to solve this case."

"*You*," Klint says, as though the man's identity alone is enough of an accusation.

"Indeed! You'll no doubt rest assured, knowing that the great detective, Herlock Sholmes, is also on the case." Sholmes steps forward and offers his hand to Asogi, who shakes it, and Klint, who does not.

"You're *not* a detective," Klint reminds him.

"I *detect* a hint of irritation, my dear fellow," Sholmes says, utterly unfazed, "but no matter. We're on the trail of the same great truth – and while I, of course, have the lead, I've no doubt that you'll catch up to me soon enough."

"Sholmes," Mikotoba says pointedly, "I believe we may have overstayed our welcome."

"Nonsense, my good man! Having only just arrived, we can assume that these gentlemen have hardly had the time to glean what we have from the scene of this burglary."

There's a tangible pause, then Asogi ventures, "Surely you mean the scene of this *murder*, Mr Sholmes?"

"Surely not, Inspector," Sholmes says with utmost confidence. "What we are seeing here is the scene of a burglary most foul."

"I believe Dr Limburger might disagree," Klint mutters.

"Indeed," Sholmes continues without missing a beat, pressing past the two of them and into the parlour to stand near the doctor's body. "The intruder's target was not the good doctor at all, but this ceramic bust that lies broken at his feet!"

Sholmes spins around, indicating the shards of white scattered around the victim's corpse.

The other three stare at him. Only Mikotoba is smiling.

"Perhaps I may better illustrate my point with this: a Herlock Sholmes's Logic and Reasoning Spectacular!"

"Absolutely not," Klint says immediately.

Sholmes looks undeterred until Mikotoba chimes in, "I think we'd best continue our investigation elsewhere, Sholmes."

Sholmes hums thoughtfully, looking back and forth between Klint and Asogi. "You may be correct, Mikotoba. We have, after all, several

more avenues of investigation to pursue. And I'm sure the good prosecutor here will catch up to us again on his own."

He looks back at Klint with a smile that could be an insult or an invitation.

Klint glowers. "I sincerely hope not."

"You've got *something* for me, Inspector," Klint says. "I don't believe you'd be here otherwise."

Asogi stands on the other side of Klint's desk, arms folded. He has just given his report of Scotland Yard's canvassing of Limburger's neighbourhood – a dishearteningly brief summary.

"Well, there *is* one thing..."

"And that is?"

"The statue that Mr. Sholmes mentioned."

"Inspector, please," Klint says. "Sholmes is an upstart, a vigilante, and a constant thorn in the side of the constabulary."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, Prosecutor van Zieks, but I believe he can be all of those things and still be right."

Klint frowns, and Asogi looks back at him coolly.

"Go on, then," Klint concedes after a moment.

"Ours is the third statue to be found shattered at a crime scene in the past four months. All have been busts of Napoleon Bonaparte found in homes of well-off families in London."

"Bonaparte?" Klint tilts his head, curious, then chuckles. "So I presume we are in pursuit of a serial killer who hates the late Emperor?"

"Not exactly," Asogi says; Klint recognises the tone of his voice that heralds bad news. "The other two crimes were not murders, which is why we hadn't heard about them."

Klint's eyes narrow. "Don't tell me they were—"

"Burglaries, my Lord."

"So what you mean to say, Inspector, is that Sholmes was correct when he said that this crime was a burglary gone awry?"

Asogi has the grace to look apologetic as he answers, "It looks that way, I'm afraid."

Klint sighs wearily. "Let's not make a point of telling him that, shall we?"

"Agreed."

When Klint opens the door to Stilton and Sons, he is unprepared for the sight that greets them inside the shop.

Not only have Sholmes and Mikotoba once again beaten them to this stage of the investigation, but they seem to be flying in the face of any possible procedure by having *choreographed* their interrogation.

"And what does this slip of paper tell us, Mikotoba?" Sholmes asks. He executes a spin that wouldn't look out of place in a ballet but seems downright ridiculous in this place of business.

Mikotoba, for his part, taps his chin pensively as he considers the page. It would look normal, perhaps, if not for the fact that he takes a shuffling step into what appears to be a *tap dance*.

"What on *Earth* is all this?"

Beside Klint, Asogi hides his face in one hand.

"It would seem to indicate, Sholmes," Mikotoba says, irrespective of their new observers, "that the three busts arrived in the same shipment from Gelder's Factory. And, Mr Stilton, might you tell us what happened to the other two statues?"

The shopkeeper flinches. "Other two?"

"Indeed!" Sholmes says, as though he can't help but interrupt. "Your shop in fact acquired *six* busts of Mr Bonaparte. One remains on your shelf, just there." He gestures toward where a pale countenance glares down at them from among the chintzy items on display. "And three have been erstwhile accounted for."

"Meaning two busts remain," Mikotoba seamlessly picks up the line of logic. "And it is paramount that we locate them as quickly as possible."

"And thus, we arrive at the final question – the grand finale, if you will, of this Dance of Deduction."

Sholmes takes hold of Mikotoba's hand, and together they execute something that might have been called a jig under more appropriate circumstances. The dance ends with the two of them back to back, as though the idiots had *rehearsed* this nonsense.

Klint steps forward irritably, disrupting the production.

"We need the names of anyone who purchased one of these statues from you, Mr Stilton," he says. "It appears that your customers are being systematically targeted for burglary."

"Burglary?" the shopkeeper asks, dismayed, at the same moment that Sholmes makes a noise of protest.

"I say, Prosecutor van Zieks, if you're going to steal the show like that, you might at least do us the courtesy of joining the Dance."

"He does seem entirely too stationary for such a timely deduction," Mikotoba remarks. His tone matches Sholmes's in sobriety, but his eyes twinkle with amusement.

Klint glares at them both in turn.

"Not a *chance*," he says flatly.

"Mr Stilton," Asogi cuts in, ever reasonable, inserting himself into the space between Klint and Sholmes. "Might we see any invoices you've issued over the past four months?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Lord van Zieks," Lady Camembert says between sips of tea from her delicate teacup. "Why would our new acquisition be of such interest to Her Majesty's judiciary?"

She sets her cup on its small saucer for only a moment before she snatches it up again, taking a sip as she looks back and forth expectantly between the two men seated across from her.

"Of course, Lady Camembert," Klint replies. For once, compared to Asogi, Klint seems to be more in his element; his typically stoic partner sits next to him, looking just a bit too stiff and formal amidst the frills and lace of Camembert's drawing room. "Let me explain. You see, your statue is one of several produced by Gelder's of London—"

Camembert laughs, a high, tinkly sound that doesn't suit her.

"Oh, I'm afraid you're mistaken," she says. "My husband bought that statue on his last trip to Nice. Isn't it lovely?"

She pauses, awaiting their response. Her expression only falters slightly when she is not met with the agreement she expected.

"I'm afraid, Lady Camembert, that your husband may have been – er, mistaken about the bust's origin," Asogi begins cautiously.

Camembert's expression grows dark; she ignores Asogi, looking instead to Klint. "Lord van Zieks," she says, sounding considerably more huffy, "is this meant to be humorous? Because if it is, I find it quite distasteful."

"N-not at all, my Lady. Why would you—?"

"Then why are you the second pair of gentlemen today to suggest to me that my husband's purchase is some— some *cheap* trinket from a *factory*?"

Klint sets his teacup down on its dainty saucer just a little too hard.

"The *second* pair?"

"Well, of course." She resettles herself in her seat, the layers of her skirt rustling against her armchair. "The others were here not an hour ago. Are you suggesting that that is a coincidence?"

"Not entirely, I'm afraid," Asogi laments. Camembert looks at him, her brow still furrowed; Asogi averts his eyes, suddenly very interested in the dregs of his tea.

Klint scrubs a hand across his face with a sigh."Pray, forgive the confusion we've caused, and allow me to start from the beginning."

"Well," Klint says, closing the door of the Camembert residence. "That was... unpleasant."

It's a cool evening, and he draws his cloak closer around himself as they descend the steps to the street.

"Surely we cannot be held responsible for Lord Camembert's dishonesty," Asogi says as he falls into step beside Klint.

"Of course not," Klint agrees. "But it was hardly a good use of time. Lady Camembert didn't even know where the blasted bust came from."

"Well, if it's any consolation, at least we know she is likely to be our burglar's next target," Asogi says.

Klint frowns. "Do we?"

"Why, it's elementary, my dear prosecutor."

Klint stops so abruptly that even Asogi, surefooted as he is, nearly collides with him. He looks around for the speaker, but the street is sparsely populated. The only person close enough to have overheard their conversation is a merchant, hunched over his cart of vegetables on the street corner.

And it *can't* be. Can it?

Klint narrows his eyes at the man. The voice is different enough, but that isn't enough to ease Klint's suspicions. He moves closer, ducking down to get a better look at the face half-hidden by a dirty brown cloak.

"Sholmes?" he hisses.

The monger laughs, straightening his stance to reveal that he is much taller than he'd seemed a mere moment ago.

"Why, whatever do you mean, sir?" the man asks. He is no longer disguising his voice, though he keeps his tone discreet. "I'm simply your friendly neighbourhood costermonger, hawking my wares on this fine afternoon."

"What are you playing at?" Klint demands, quiet but irritated.

"Why, I am here for the very reason Inspector Asogi has just articulated."

Klint glares at Asogi as though his words somehow summoned this man in disguise. Asogi doesn't balk; if anything, he looks amused at Klint's consternation.

"The Camembert house is an easier target than the Wensleydale home we visited earlier," Asogi explains. "It's in a less crowded area – fictitious cabbage mongers notwithstanding – and it's off the main thoroughfare."

"Precisely, Inspector," Sholmes says, "and there is one other key element that leads me to deduce that our thief will likely show his face."

"Lord Camembert is overseas," Asogi reasons.

"And he'll have taken some of the staff with him," Klint adds in agreement, "meaning there are fewer people on the premises than usual."

"Indeed, gentlemen, by the stunning power of your intellects combined, you have come to the very conclusion that I deduced hours ago: our thief is very likely to show his face here imminently."

Klint frowns but decides to let the not-so-thinly veiled gibe pass. "And so, you're awaiting him... in the guise of a peddler?"

"I am awaiting him in the guise he least expects. And, if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'd prefer not to tip my hand just yet."

"By all means," Klint says with a dismissive wave of his hand.

"So, a sixpence should suffice, my Lord Prosecutor."

Klint bristles. "*What*?"

"For the cabbage, of course," Sholmes says, as though he's concluding a negotiation that has never taken place. "We could hardly risk my cover by letting people think we are talking about anything other than cruciferous vegetables, now, could we?"

Klint frowns, and Sholmes smiles. He's wearing a false nose that blends seamlessly into his own skin, but his impish blue eyes are all too familiar. Klint sighs and fishes in his coin purse for the appropriate amount.

"Oh, thank you, my Lord!" Sholmes seems to shrink before their eyes, and his voice is suddenly much reedier. He turns to his cart to retrieve a head of cabbage, which, grinning, he presents to Klint. "I'm sure you won't be disappointed."

And then he withdraws, off to find the next man foolish enough to pay for one of his godforsaken vegetables.

Asogi fails to hide his smile; Klint, still surly, shoves the cabbage in his direction. "Here," he says gruffly. "Now, let's get on with it."

Asogi obediently tucks the cabbage under one arm. "Of course, Prosecutor van Zieks."

"Perhaps we could have done with disguises ourselves."

He knows Asogi's comment is light-hearted – meant only to break the quiet tension of their terse wait outside the Camembert house – but it strikes a nerve anyway.

"This is an investigation, Inspector," Klint says sourly, "not a costume ball."

Twilight is upon them, broken only by the dots of light in the windows of the homes lining the street. The lamps have yet to be lit on this street, obscuring them in shadow.

Klint hates the waiting.

For all his pent-up energy, though, it's Asogi who reacts first when shouts erupt from the house.

There's further commotion as they run, the sound of slamming doors, and a great crash. Asogi follows the sounds around the side of the house. Rounding the house, there's no sign of the disturbance, but they do catch sight of two silhouettes beneath a lamppost and move to join them.

"What's happened?" Klint demands. Only then does he realise that the men before him are not police; he's addressing the great detecting duo.

Sholmes is still in disguise. Mikotoba is holding a cabbage.

Klint rolls his eyes.

"Our thief has left us an important clue," Sholmes says. He points to where shattered pieces of white ceramic are scattered in the glow of the lamplight. "You see, he's taken the time to stop and break this statue, here in the light. That tells us two important things."

"Indeed," Mikotoba chimes in, looking thoughtfully at the broken pieces.

"The first is simply confirmation. Breaking the statues has never been incidental but quite the deliberate act. But that's elementary, of course. The real intrigue here is the *why*. So, let us think: he's taken pains to carry out this desecration mid-pursuit here, where it's well-lit. Which can mean only one thing – our thief hates the late Emperor so desperately that he wishes to highlight his spite for all the world to see!"

Asogi glances sideways at Klint, who says nothing.

Mikotoba hums curiously. "Or perhaps," he ventures, "he is looking for something?"

"Indeed, Mikotoba," Sholmes says quickly. The course correction seems to have taken none of the wind out of his sails. "He is looking for something he knows to be hidden inside one of these statues, but he's unsure which."

"You mentioned a pursuit," Asogi says. "Where is our suspect now?"

Sholmes looks at him blankly, then waves a hand dismissively. "Oh, that. He ran off that way, with your patrolmen in pursuit. But you see, gentlemen, I've discovered something much more integral to our investigation!" He indicates the shards again in a grand, sweeping gesture.

Klint swears softly and turns to track down the thief and his pursuers; Asogi follows.

"You can of course express your amazement later, gentlemen!" Sholmes calls after them.

A door cracks open, and light falls across the drawing room floor. It stretches far enough to illuminate the mantel where a stone-faced Napoleon stares blankly at the intrusion.

A shadow passes through the doorway and moves across the floor noiselessly. It nears the mantel when suddenly—

"That's far enough."

The figure startles at Klint's words and makes to retreat. Klint does not move to stop him, instead flicking on the nearest gas lamp. Orange light bathes the room, revealing to the intruder his hopeless situation: several policemen already surround him, and Asogi, katana at the ready, moves to stand between him and the door.

The inspector's brow furrows. "Mr Stilton?"

Klint indeed recognises the shopkeeper who'd sold the very statues they'd been tracking. "Interesting development, sir," Klint comments, even as he nods to the nearest officer to detain the man. "Breaking in to break your own merchandise, Mr Stilton? Good for business, perhaps, but it seems like quite the ordeal. I can't help but wonder what you've really been searching for."

"I believe I have the answer to your query," says a voice from across the room – a voice that is not Stilton's.

Startled, Klint looks toward the doorway but spies no new arrivals. Surely, he's not so haunted by Sholmes that he hears the man even in his absence?

That's when he notes that there are five uniformed police in the room – where there had only been four with them when they'd arrived.

With a glance to ensure the detained shopkeeper is well in check, Klint stalks toward this extra officer. He stops in front of Sholmes, arms folded. "Where did you get that uniform?"

"A story for another time," the Great Consternation dodges the question, "as what I have to share about our shopkeeper here is of utmost—"

"No, Sholmes," Klint says, stepping forward until he's quite close to the detective, glaring down at him. "I don't think you understand how far you've crossed the line this time. Impersonating an officer? Making a mockery of *my* case with your—?"

"Evidence?" It's Asogi who interrupts him; Klint turns to glance at his partner, who looks back pointedly. "Surely we should hear him out, Prosecutor van Zieks. You can berate him about the uniform later."

Klint scowls at Sholmes, who peers back at him over the top of his large false moustache.

"Fine," he says finally.

Sholmes doesn't hesitate. "I've uncovered quite the fraternal conspiracy during my investigation, you see." He pushes confidently past Klint, facing Stilton in the middle of the room. "Because you're not the first burglar in your family, are you, Mr Stilton?"

"How— how did you—?"

"Elementary, sir," Sholmes answers before the man can even finish asking his question. "Even now, your brother sits in prison, serving out *his* sentence for a string of burglaries – a spree that ended, in fact, only just before your own began. But there's an interesting pattern to both of your crimes: You only target merchandise sold from your own shop."

Stilton says nothing, but his flinching is enough to tell Klint that Sholmes is correct.

"His own merchandise?" Klint asks.

Asogi is watching them all intently when he chimes in. "I would suppose," he speculates, "that a man would not need to settle for selling something once if he could sell it again and make double the profit."

"Just so," says Sholmes. "It was quite the scheme, really. You selling worthless products from Gelder's of London, and your brother working tirelessly to bring the merchandise back into your inventory with no one the wiser."

"But your brother was caught, and you carried on alone," Klint says. "Only... you're not stealing back stock, you're *destroying* it."

"Indeed, and I believe there is one last detail that will bring this whole tale to a close, my dear Prosecutor. Because, you see...." Klint finds himself abruptly caught by the elbow. Sholmes drags him toward the mantel, where he's swung in a circle; the pair of them come to a stop in front of the ceramic Napoleon. "Your brother's final crime – the one for which he now sits incarcerated – was the theft of several items. Most were confiscated during his trial, but one was never found. And it was much more valuable than any bust of Bonaparte will ever be."

Sholmes grins at Klint.

Then he knocks the bust off the mantel.

Klint scarcely has time to make a noise of protest before the ceramic shatters at his feet. Sholmes stoops to sift through the pieces.

When he stands, he's holding a ring: a sizable diamond in an elegant gold setting.

"A fine piece," he says, presenting the ring to Stilton with a flourish. "The likes of which your shop is unlikely to see again, I'd wager. How many hundreds of pounds would you say this is worth, Mr Shopkeeper?"

Stilton again says nothing.

"But you've been done in by your own greed," Sholmes continues, "because you wouldn't break your own merchandise, would you? Not until you'd had the chance to profit off of it at least once before you smashed to bits. And to think, if you'd just broken all six statues when your brother told you where he'd hidden this ring, all of us legal professionals—"

"You are *not* a legal professional, Sholmes."

"—and legal-adjacent great detectives would have been none the wiser."

It plays out like a game after that; Stilton confirms Sholmes's story on the spot and even confesses to the murder of Limburger, accidental though it was.

"I never meant for all of this," he says ruefully. "I've not known what to do with myself since Oliver went to jail, truthfully. Perhaps it should have been me all along."

Stilton is quickly handcuffed. As the officers lead him away, Asogi asks, "I am curious, Mr Sholmes. How did you determine that the ring was hidden in the Wensleydale statue? Even Mr Stilton wasn't sure."

Sholmes laughs. "Oh, it's quite simple, Inspector. I didn't."

"You *what*?" Klint hisses.

"There were only two statues left, after all, so this statue was just as likely as not the hiding place of the treasure our shopkeeper has been seeking."

"Just as likely as...." Klint's words fall off abruptly; he covers his face with one gloved hand.

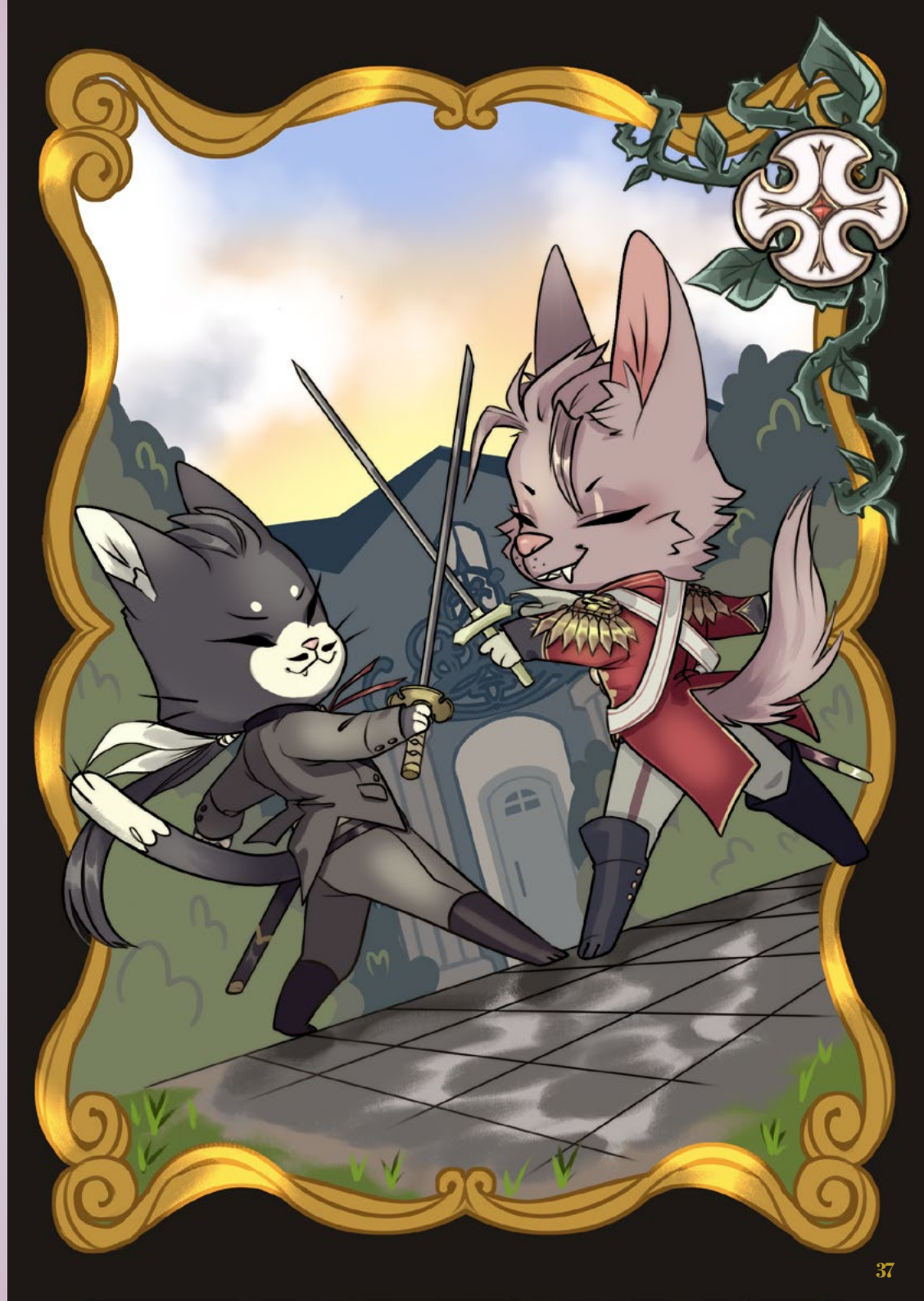
"Even so," Asogi says, "it would seem we owe you a debt of gratitude for your assistance with our case."

He looks pointedly at Klint, who grimaces.

"There's a place for your brand of logic, Mr Sholmes, I'll grant you that," he says begrudgingly. Then his expression turns wry. "But don't you *ever* make me dance with you again."

"My dear Mr Prosecutor," Sholmes says, exuberant as ever, "I'm afraid I can make no such promise."

The End



MAY YOU FEEL THE JAWS OF THE BEAST
PROFESSOR
AT YOUR THROAT EVERY TIME YOU SWALLOW

For Those Who Still Remain

Written by Stormy
Illustrated by Ham

tags: lost child/in distress, arranged marriage (mentioned)
ships: Klint van Zieks/Lady Baskerville (not the focal)

19TH JUNE, 1906
THE VAN ZIEKS ESTATE

"DINNER WAS GREAT, but this is what I have been anticipating the most today, Uncle Zieksy."

Barok van Zieks settled back into his chair, watching the young woman across from him as she shuffled around her bag, pulling out some type of gadget and a tea set. The evening had been delightful thus far, as he always appreciated the opportunity for Iris to update him on all the happenings in her life. Tonight's dinner conversation pertained mostly to how everyone else had celebrated her birthday. It sounded as though she had had a wonderful day, filled with a wide range of festivities.

It was surprising to hear *this* was her most anticipated part of the day though. Barok figured his offer had to be relatively high on her list, but certainly not at the top. If anything... well, his eyes lingered on the manuscript resting on the table.

The Hound of the Baskervilles. If anything, he would have assumed *that* would be the best event of the day.

"For one, I'm quite excited for you to try this tea blend," she said and offered him a cup. She caught his staring at the manuscript, and quirked a smile at him. "And for two... *that*. Hurley mentioned you already knew about it."

He did. It had been one of the astronomically rare times when he and Herlock Sholmes had completely agreed on something. They had carefully revealed the truth to Iris over the years, answering every question her blossoming mind could conceive of as best they could, but Iris was a child no longer. She was a bright young woman, and the future ahead of her was developing brilliantly. She deserved to step into it having full knowledge of her past, and full control over what it meant to her, what it made her, and what she made of it.

So, when she reached sixteen years of age, it was agreed that Sholmes would give Iris ownership of the story she had penned when she was younger, along with all the notes that had inspired it. The detective would answer and explain what he could, and Barok would supplement the rest – *another* night. Tonight, on the eve of her sixteenth birthday, he had forbidden talk of the Professor altogether. There was no reason to sully such a special day by rehashing *that* story.

Iris had already requested a separate set of stories for him to regale her with, anyways. She had asked for stories of her father – stories of Klint van Zieks as the man he had *been*, not the terror he had become in his final days. Sholmes knew this and had readily agreed that all else would be told in due time.

The only thing Sholmes had not agreed to was the *final* gift he intended to bestow, though that was due to a lack of knowledge. With time and age, Barok had softened considerably towards the man – not that he would freely admit as much – but that hardly meant he had to detail all aspects of his life and decisions to Herlock Sholmes. This was... a familial matter, if not a personal one. He did not need Sholmes's approval.

For now, though, he nodded at his niece, acquiescing to her request for tales of her father. "I did," Barok said, motioning towards the manuscript. "Speaking of *that*, I fully intend on gifting you what you asked for, but you must be the one to lead this conversation. Within the predetermined boundaries, what would you like to know?"

"Within the predetermined boundaries?" Iris repeated with a teasing smile, "I feel like I'm being interrogated, Uncle."

He felt her scrutinising gaze as he took a sip of the tea. He smiled sheepishly with a nod, both at her words and in approval of the fruity tea blend she had made. "Apologies," he said simply, choosing not to explain his current state of mind. She did not need to know. "No interrogation, I only meant for you to ask whatever your heart desires."

Iris's smile turned more sympathetic – of course she knew this was not an easy subject to broach – before she started, "Well... there is one thing I'd like to know, and you're the only one who has the answer, I think. What was he like as a child?"

"As a child?" Barok echoed. It was not what he had expected her to start with, but it made sense. And she was correct: he was probably the only person left who could answer such a question.

"Klint was an undeniably bold child," he started, pulling memories of their childhood to the forefront of his mind in waves. "More so than I, at the very least, though that was hardly difficult to achieve. Yet, despite his adolescent desire for adventure, he also shouldered the responsibility of being an older brother very well."

Barok paused, a fond chuckle bubbling from his chest. "I pestered him constantly when we were children. I followed him *everywhere*, insisted on doing *everything* with him, and imitated him as best I could. To his credit, Klint never seemed to mind too much. I... suppose he always knew it was only ever done out of love and admiration," he admitted with a soft sigh. "He lived up to my every expectation. He taught me much as a child, cleared many paths for me, and took care of me as well as a boy his age could."

He caught Iris watching him intently with familiar blue eyes. The striking resemblance dredged up an old, treasured memory, and before he could consider otherwise, the story was falling from his lips.

"One of my first memories ever was one of the few times I *shouldn't* have followed him," he admitted. He did not need to ask if Iris wanted him to continue; it was evident in the way she sat straighter, eyes sparking and head tilting slightly in curiosity. He would have laughed if the pang in his chest didn't momentarily wind him – it was so *heartbreakingly* like how Klint always reacted.

"I could not have been older than five at the time," Barok continued after a moment to regain his composure. "Klint was heading out to inspect the lands on our property. When he instructed me not to follow him, I crept after him regardless... as much as a toddler could anyways. Admittedly," he trailed off, thoughtful, "to this day I still don't know if he was aware I was following him or not. I... believe he did and was perhaps proving a point. Regardless, the longer we went on, the more exhausted I became and the more I started to lag behind. When I inevitably lost sight of him, I panicked."

The remnants of that panic lingered for years after he lost Klint entirely; only recently had it truly begun to subside.

"In my fear, I ran towards where I had last seen him, and came across a creek. I should have known better, but I was a child, and in my exhaustion, I was also incredibly uncoordinated. So, when I tried jumping over it, my foot snagged on some underbrush, and I tumbled straight in." He grimaced at the memory of the cold water immediately soaking him through. "Shocked, drenched, cold, and believing myself to be alone, the only thing I could do was cry."

"Wait," Iris interjected, "is this why you get grumpy standing in the rain?"

Barok grimaced again. "I suppose one of many reasons, yes," he answered grudgingly. "Of course, I was never in any real danger.

Klint came swooping in as though carried on the wings of a guardian angel and deftly pulled me from the creek. After confirming I was unharmed, we hurried back to the estate, and *that* was where his cleverness and boldness came into play," he said, glancing back at Iris.

"Somehow, Klint managed to sneak us past every adult in the manor and cleaned me up without anyone noticing. By that point, dry clothes and my brother's presence had calmed me down. I was quiet as a mouse, awaiting my older brother's scolding," he sighed and shook his head with a small laugh.

"It never came. Instead, we both swore never to tell any adults about what had happened, and then he put me in my room with a kind, though firm, reminder: there were places he would go where I should not follow. In time, I would be able to tread those paths myself, just not *quite* then. It was rather sage advice from a fourteen-year-old," he said and smiled wryly at his niece. "Though, I believe that, back then, all he wished was for me to stop ruining his outings."

In hindsight, it was perhaps the most ironically prominent advice his brother could have ever given him. Barok fell quiet, rather unsure of what else to say with that left hanging in the air.

"No matter his intentions, he clearly loved you," Iris spoke finally, "and you him."

His eyes slipped closed, and he nodded. For tonight, that was all that mattered. "Does that answer your question?"

"It does," she replied. "It also confirms what I've heard about Lord Klint van Zieks and how he'd move Heaven and Earth for his *darling* brother."

His eyes snapped open just in time to see Iris's gaze sparking with mischief as she made an obvious, yet effective, attempt at lightening the mood. Despite himself, he smiled; if anyone was going to tease him over it now, it might as well be family.

"I suppose that carried over into adulthood?" Iris asked, "I know he was a good prosecutor, but no one talks much about his personality."

"At heart, Klint was a family man, yes," Barok agreed. "Though that privilege of moving Heaven and Earth did not extend just to his family. Klint cared immensely for several people, including those of the lower classes he worked to protect."

"He was good to his clients, then?"

He nodded. "The very first case Klint won was against a rather vile man who had shorted several rail workers out of their pay and endangered their very lives with blatant disregard for safety regulations," he explained. "It set a precedent for the type of cases my brother would choose to prosecute."

He released a sigh and sat back, considering that day. "I was not allowed to be present in the courtroom, but I remember how proud Klint had been emerging from it. At first, I was young and foolish enough to have thought it to be about the win, but Klint had made it blindingly apparent once we had returned home that he took pride not in his skills, but the fact he had served justice to that man, and, more importantly, *granted* justice to those workers."

Klint had been so proud that day, so damned happy in that moment, and he had appeared so righteous in serving justice for the downtrodden. It was what his brother had always wanted to do – protecting those who could not protect themselves – and it was what Barok knew he was *incredibly* skilled at; it was what Klint had been doing for his little brother all his life.

"Truthfully, the way he spoke that night, and the way he doggedly continued to for years thereafter, was the inspiration for me to go into law," Barok admitted. "Always rousing his little brother to follow in his footsteps."

"You both wanted to help people," Iris responded. "I understand that. It's why I wanted to study medicine."

Medicine was a far better pursuit. After everything they both had endured, Barok knew Klint would not have wanted his daughter anywhere near the judiciary. *He* did not want Iris near the judiciary.

"And... his home life...?" Iris's question pulled him out of his thoughts before he could mull them over too deeply. Her voice was significantly softer than before, almost tentative. "You said he was a family man?" she continued, and then hesitated again as she stared down at her tea in thought. "So, he and my mother...?"

Barok sighed, a sound laced with sympathy. She would have received few answers about this subject too, and unfortunately even *he* felt unqualified to speak at length on Klint's marriage. He could assuage her obvious concerns, at least.

"They loved each other dearly," he confirmed and smiled when her shoulders relaxed. "Though they were incredibly private people. Lady Baskerville saw a side of Klint the world was never privy to – a side that *I* only caught the occasional glimpse of in the privacy of these walls."

Iris looked up at him from her tea, and he resisted the urge to sigh again at her gaze, silently imploring for more. "They had a typical relationship for the people of the nobility. I... don't know the exact details myself, admittedly, on how... *arranged* they had truly been," he fumbled, "but they were considered a good match, and they developed spectacularly well after. Regardless of their beginnings, it was undeniable your father venerated your mother, and she adored him in turn."

Iris considered this for a long moment before nodding at his explanation. "And you?" she asked. "How did you feel about them?"

That was... not something he had ever been asked. "I was quite fond of your mother, actually. She was a nice, respectable woman," Barok answered after some thought. "And what she brought out in Klint... I could not have been more grateful. She was one of the few to actually get my brother to relax, and around her, he shone in a way he had not since we were children. And, of course," he added with a smile, "their love produced the best thing to ever happen in my life."

It took Iris a moment to catch what he meant, but when she did, she grinned at him, a slight blush dusting her cheeks.

That was enough for him. Barok nodded in return with a quiet sigh, "I do apologise that I cannot give you more, in that regard."

"Knowing they truly loved each other is enough," Iris assured him. She fell silent and twirled her teacup on its saucer in thought. "Though, I do wonder...," she stopped and sighed, "I know I agreed to a lot we *wouldn't* talk about tonight, but... I feel like now is as good a time as any to ask: why do you think they never told you about me?"

Barok released a long breath, a means to stall for time as one of the few, remaining splinters in his heart pressed deeper, cracking the surface. He looked away from her in thought, his eyes trailing towards the window and the darkening skies outside as night fell over London. One by one, the streetlights lining the roads below started to glow.

"I'm sorry if I overstepped—"

"In all honesty, that is the one question I have never answered myself," he admitted, effectively ending her apology. It was an understandable question; one he had been asking himself for six years. It was as appropriate a time as any, and it technically did not cross the boundaries he had set prior to this conversation.

"My brother," he trailed off and shook his head, displeased with that start. "*Your father* was not in a proper state of mind at the time. There was obviously *much* he was avoiding telling me." It was difficult to keep a bitter edge from colouring his voice.

Iris set her teacup down and focussed her attention on him. He gave her a moment to speak if she needed to, but when she didn't, he collected his thoughts enough to continue. "Perhaps Genshin *was* supposed to inform me, and given what happened... well...." His voice trailed off into nothing.

His head lowered in shame, eyes staring down at his steepled fingers in his lap. The possibility had tormented him often over the years – an added point of regret surrounding his final actions towards a man he had considered a friend. Still, Genshin had had ample opportunity to mention Lady Baskerville's pregnancy – to even use it as a bargaining tool – and never did. Therein lay the more likely explanation: Genshin Asogi had been an honourable man to the bitter, biting end, and had remained true to his final promises to Klint.

"Perhaps it had always been Klint's intention to keep you a secret and thus, from being tarnished by our name," Barok mused.

It was the most probable answer he had arrived at over the last six years. He would not put it past his dear brother to have readily considered how his actions would affect his child in the future, once they were discovered. Klint *had* to have known the truth eventually coming to light was an inevitability.

"Perhaps, with everything else he had been undergoing at the time, it had simply slipped his mind. Honestly, there are thousands of possibilities as to why I was not informed of your existence, and each one is as plausible as the next. And each day I..."

Barok passed a hard breath through his nose, forcing his jaw to unclench and pressing his hands flat onto his thighs. "I sincerely regret that decision was made for me. Each day, I truly, *truly* regret that, Iris."

With a burst, the pressure in his heart finally eased – that final splinter plucked – and Barok looked over to find his niece staring back at him, sympathetic and sad, a few tears glistening in those familiar blue eyes.

"But," he continued, "I do not for a moment regret what it did for you in the end. A truly spectacular, young woman sits before me now, and it is because she was raised in the best possible circumstances."

Barok stood up and gave her a smile. "I am simply glad the truth *did* reconnect us when the time was right. I am grateful fate granted me the chance to watch you become the woman you are meant to be."

"So am I, Uncle Zieksy," Iris said quietly. She wiped a stray tear from her eye and stood as well. "So am I."

He wasn't given the chance to offer to comfort her before Iris stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him. He returned the hug in kind, muttering a quiet apology. "I do wish we had more time, but I was informed you have a curfew tonight."

"He *is* allowing me an extra hour tonight because he's walking me home," Iris pointed out. She pulled away from him and gave a cheeky smile, "It wouldn't do to keep Hurley waiting, trouble tends to find him."

Barok smiled wanly, choosing not to say anything else. He could hardly badmouth the man when he had extended Iris's curfew and was walking her home. The detective cared for her as his own. Instead, Barok nodded and swept his arm towards the entrance, following after his niece as they walked towards the front door in comfortable silence. It allowed him to mull over his one final gift to her.

It wasn't until he assisted her with getting her coat back on and she was turning towards the door that he placed a hand on her shoulder to stop her. "There *is* one more gift I want to give you," Barok said. He fished around his left pocket and produced the small trinket.

"A prosecutor's badge?" Iris asked, tilting her head to look at it.

"*Your father's* prosecutor's badge," Barok clarified. Gently, he took her hand and pressed the badge into her palm before curling her fingers around it. "I have carried it with me for... far too many years to count. In that time, it has brought me both immense comfort and immense grief. There were many nights it was the only thing keeping me afloat in the darkness, and many more where I wanted nothing more than to throw it into the sea. It has been the only thing of Klint's I have had for a long while... but it is no longer mine to keep."

He no longer had need for it; not in the sense that he no longer needed Klint, but in that he had finally found his own way. His free hand subtly slipped into his left pocket, thumb tracing over the bottom of his own badge. He had found his own calling now, had his own legacy – he no longer needed to follow in Klint's footsteps.

This was the final act of letting go.

It was all too fitting as well. This was the only correct thing to do with Klint's badge: for it to be passed on from the idolising younger brother who had had his heart broken upon his older brother's death and yet again upon learning the truth his older brother had kept hidden from him to the man's daughter, who had no true bias for or against her father, and all the time in the world to determine what he and his actions meant to her.

"I... I don't know what to say," Iris whispered and looked up to him with wide, blue eyes. "Are you sure?"

Barok nodded. After a moment, she pulled her hand away and moved it close to her heart, badge still clutched between her fingers. "I'll cherish this," she said softly, "Both for who it belonged to... and who gifted it to me. Thank you."

"If that is what you want," he nodded, "then it is an honour."

When she remained silent, he smiled at her, "When you have more questions..." – which was an inevitability – "you are always welcome to come and ask."

"I know. I will," Iris promised. She returned his smile and leaned up, kissing his cheek goodbye. He noted she was once again clutching her manuscript tightly to her chest, now with the badge overlaid on the title page.

He nodded and saw her most of the way to the door before adding one more thing. "Oh, and Iris?" Barok called and let her turn back to him before offering her a coy smile. "Just because it is in your possession now does not mean that badge gives you permission to practice law."

Despite the emotionally laden air, Iris shook her head with a laugh and waved to him as she departed. Now staring at the door, Barok noted she had not actually *agreed* to that stipulation, but then, had he truly expected anything less?

With a deep sigh, he grasped at his own prosecutor's badge and lifted it from his pocket, staring at it as it rested heavily in his palm. He figured that, after passing over Klint's badge to its new, rightful owner, he would feel a flurry of emotions that he would be all too tempted to drown out with a drink, but the more he stood there considering the past few hours, the more Barok realised that what he was feeling really was quite simple:

Pride.

"She brings such honour to a name she shall never carry," he spoke softly, tracing the edges of his badge, "Were you here to see her, you would be even more exorbitantly proud than I am. I just know it, Brother."

Just on the other side of the door, as Iris stepped out into the warm summer night, she had a similar thought. She could see Hurley waiting for her at the corner of the street, outlined by the streetlight's glow, but could not bring herself to call out to him just yet.

Instead, she gripped the prosecutor's badge a little tighter in her hand and glanced back at the door with a smile. "He's come such a long way from everything that's happened. I hope you're proud of him... Father."

Iris looked down at the badge, tilting it a bit as it caught the light from the streetlamps, before she pocketed it altogether and called out to her Daddy to start the trek home.

The End

make it new (but stay in the lines)

Written by Eliot

tags: alcohol consumption, infidelity (briefly mentioned), implied period-typical racism
ships: Klint van Zieks/Lady Baskerville (briefly mentioned)

KAZUMA THREW OPEN the door to Barok's office without knocking. If Barok had been feeling generous, he could have chalked it up to some leftover familiarity from the time Kazuma had spent as his apprentice, rather than a complete disregard for things like protocol.

It was likely a mix of both, and Barok was sufficiently accustomed – one could even say resigned – to Kazuma's lack of decorum to not remark upon it.

"And a good...," he hastily checked the clock, to see how many hours had passed while he had been working on a case of his own, "...evening to you as well."

"Good for some, I suppose," said Kazuma, lip curling. He slapped a file down on Barok's desk before stomping across the room in search of a spare chair. Kazuma spared a single, indecipherable glance towards Klint's portrait, still hanging in its place of honour, before dragging the chair over to the other side of Barok's desk.

Barok had never asked what Kazuma thought of the portrait's continued presence in his office. Kazuma had never commented on it while he was Barok's apprentice; indeed, in the aftermath of Barok's trial and then Lord Stronghart's, they had rarely talked about anything that wasn't their work. And now that he had his own office, Barok's choice of decor was no longer any of his business, but still

Barok couldn't help but wonder what he thought of seeing the face of the man his father had killed every time he set foot in Barok's office.

The portrait had been commissioned prior to Klint's death from an artist who had painted notable society gentlemen from prime ministers to dukes. The painting had been meant to hang alongside a portrait of their father in the halls of their country manor, but now the manor stood empty. Barok spent most of his time in London, and keeping the painting in his office was as much a comfort as it was a reminder.

"Still working on the Amberley case?" Barok said, glancing at the names on the file Kazuma had dropped on top of his own notes for tomorrow's trial.

"For all the good it's doing," said Kazuma. Barok couldn't blame him for his frustration; the suspect was a wealthy nobleman, and everyone who had initially come forward against him had later recanted their statements. Barok knew that Kazuma suspected either bribery or threats, and Barok thought he was probably right, but the police were dragging their feet on the investigation and there was nothing either of them could do about that. Barok had never been particularly popular amongst the detectives – he'd spent the early years of his career lost in a haze of grief, throwing himself into his work with a vengeance and making no effort to make or maintain friendships with his coworkers – but prior to his arrest and the subsequent revelations about Klint, at least he'd been respected. And perhaps some of that had been fear, and perhaps his colleagues had secretly believed him to be the Reaper, but at least they'd brought the reports he requested on time and had followed his lead during investigations. Now, not so much.

He didn't regret making the details of the case public – not Stronghart's crimes, not his brother's choices, not even his own role in the subversion of justice that had led to Mr Asogi's death – but it made it more difficult to do his job when the police dragged their feet about cooperating with him. And even that was nothing compared to the far more unfounded disregard many of them held for Kazuma.

"Hmm," said Barok. "Would you care for a drink?"

"It can't hurt," Kazuma said, so Barok poured him a glass of wine – a rich, dry red from his latest trip to the vineyards of central Greece – and set aside his trial notes so that none of them got swept up into Kazuma's file. His own case was simple enough that he didn't need much more preparation anyway. Well, as long as the shipping magnate's wife was willing to testify that she'd been having an affair with his business partner, and that he'd told her before his death that he suspected her husband of embezzling company funds. The defendant would have been wealthy enough – not to mention well-connected, with a cousin in the House of Lords – to get the entire

incident swept under the rug, except that his victim was equally wealthy and well-connected.

It was depressing, sometimes, that what it took for a powerful man to be brought to justice was for his victim to be another powerful man.

"So, what is it that requires my expertise?" said Barok. "If what you need help with is getting the police to cooperate, you'd be better off getting into the lead detective's good graces. It's Inspector Bradstreet, is it not?" Bradstreet had been around longer than Barok had, already well-established during Klint's day. Klint had never liked him much either.

Kazuma tossed back his wine in one swallow, nodded, and said, "He won't speak to me. He always claims to be busy working on a different case, even though I know for a fact this is the only one he's on right now. And besides, usually when he claims to be busy, he's sneaking off with his mistress anyway."

Barok didn't bother asking how Kazuma knew that; presumably Inspector Lestrade, with her keen nose for gossip, had shared that tidbit with him. She was generally less eager to share her gossip with Barok, likely out of a misplaced fear of disapproval, but if one lurked around the station for long enough waiting for evidence to be processed, one picked up these sorts of things anyway.

"I doubt I'll be able to get him to cooperate either," said Barok. "Bradstreet only has the position he does thanks to the patronage of the late Duke Holdnesse, so he's... not well-inclined toward my family at present." Which was a bit of an understatement. Barok doubted the man ever wanted to see his face again. He might've made it all the way to Commissioner if not for his noble sponsor's untimely death – and subsequent disgrace, once people went digging for a reason why he might have fallen prey to a killer known to target corrupt members of the aristocracy.

"Ah," said Kazuma. His lips twitched, his eyes flicking up, briefly, toward Klint's portrait. Duke Holdernesse had been the second of the Professor's victims, a list of names that Kazuma had no doubt committed to memory just as carefully as Barok had.

He wondered if Kazuma still felt the weight of them, now that his father had been exonerated.

"But if there's anything else I can do...," said Barok, letting the question trail off. It had taken him some time to learn that Kazuma's distaste for either asking or accepting advice from him was just as much about Kazuma's own prickly pride as it was about his discomfort with Barok specifically, and longer than that to learn how to offer help without causing offence.

Kazuma snorted, reaching for the wine bottle to pour himself another glass. "Sometimes," he said, "a man just wants to complain. Or has that been outlawed now?"

"Not as far as I'm aware," said Barok, recognising Kazuma's barb in the friendly spirit it had been intended. "Well, then, complain away." He spread his arm graciously, like a host welcoming guests to his grand home.

(Not that he'd done much entertaining of late, or at all, really, since he'd become the master of a grand house worth entertaining in. Klint had been the social one, especially once he had married and he and his wife were always inviting people over to see what Charlotte had done to the gardens or the library or the decor in the ballroom, while Barok lurked in a corner with a book or a glass of wine or, ideally, both.)

Kazuma, with a great deal of gesticulating and slamming his fist on Barok's desk and nearly spilling his wine, explained the ins and outs of the case. Barok let the words wash over him, thinking about the days he'd spent listening to his brother talk through – and complain about – tough cases in this very office.

Sometimes, he wondered if it was cruelty or some twisted sense of sympathy that had caused Stronghart to give him Klint's old office. In his memories, it was still a safe, bright place, with sunlight streaming in through the windows brighter than should've been possible with the smog outside. Even at night, the lamplight had felt cheerful and warm. The room had begun to feel cold and dimly lit once it became his, and after a few years, he'd stopped trying to make it cheerful. If he was truly haunted, he'd thought, his office may as well look the part of a reaper's lair.

His natural aesthetic tendency toward the austere didn't help either. Klint would've ruffled his hair and told him that he looked like he was perpetually in a state of half-mourning. Convenient, since that was how Barok often felt: like he would always be mourning Klint and the life he could've led and the things Barok would never get to share with him.

When Barok was in university, he would spend the evenings after class in Klint's office, poring over his textbooks while Klint prepared trial notes and talked over all the possible angles of a case. He'd written his essays from a desk on the far side of the room – the space that Kazuma had occupied during his tenure as Barok's assistant – listening to Klint think aloud. With Barok as his audience, he would talk himself in circles about what strategy he thought the defence might take, or where he wanted the police to investigate next, or how disheartened he was by the unevenness with which justice was dispensed.

Can we even call ourselves the judiciary, he'd said one late night, with dark circles like ink smudges under his eyes, *if what we do is no longer justice? And how can it be justice if it's distributed so unevenly? If the laws that apply to poor men don't apply to rich men?*

In retrospect, it was easy for Barok to see how much Klint had been struggling, like a fracture in a glass that went unnoticed, growing imperceptibly until it shattered entirely, and you were left with the broken pieces and blood on your hands. But at the time, Barok had thought that Klint was just tired, that he would regain his confidence once he'd brought the Professor to justice. And Barok had been tired as well, busy with his last few months of university.

He'd cursed himself for that later; as if his academic record had mattered when his brother needed him.

It had been Genshin Asogi who had noticed. Genshin Asogi, with his keen eyes and a sense of justice to rival Klint's, had been the one to notice the depths of Klint's despair and to piece together what it meant. Barok still didn't know if he was comforted by that or not, but at least now he could think back to those days with the three of them in Klint's office – because Mr Asogi had been there almost as much as Barok had, discussing cases or gossiping about their colleagues – without choking on his rage.

Mr Asogi had so often sat where his son was now seated, though Barok had never heard him rail against the British judiciary the way Kazuma did. It had gotten better since Stronghart was ousted and they'd begun the work of pulling out the deep roots of his corruption. Barok had to believe that. But it had never just been Stronghart, and so nothing they did ever seemed like enough.

And Kazuma's patience was fraying. Where Klint's anger had hollowed him out, as if he had been exhausted by the strength of his own feelings, Kazuma wore his anger like armour, like his righteousness could protect him from the disappointment of a world that wasn't changing fast enough.

But Barok knew what to look for now, knew that Klint's disillusionment and Kazuma's frustration came from the same place. He didn't say any of this, because he knew that Kazuma would hate it, but for as much as he could see the echoes of Mr Asogi in Kazuma – in his handwriting and the cut of his jawline and the way he held a sword – Kazuma reminded him nearly as much of Klint.

"—but that can't be the truth, which means that I just have to get him to admit to the *real* truth," Kazuma was saying. "If I can't find the evidence, I'll just have to catch him up in his lies when I see him in court." Well, that sounded less like Klint and more like Mr Naruhodo, about to bluff his way through another impossible trial, but nevertheless.

"And how will you convince the jury? Or the judge?" said Barok, and Kazuma scowled at him. Really, it would depend on which judge was assigned to the case. Some were more inclined to listen to reason and evidence, while others were more inclined to listen to prosecutors whose fathers they'd studied with at Oxford and Cambridge.

(Klint had been an Oxford man, but he'd sent Barok to the far newer and more contentious University of London, hoping that it would give him a greater appreciation for the people he could meet in the world outside the Eton-to-Oxford-to-Whitehall pipeline. Barok appreciated that, not least of all because it had brought Albert into his life, but it did leave him without the kinds of connections he could've leveraged with some of the more old-fashioned judges.)

"If the judge and jury think Amberley's title outweighs whatever proof I find," said Kazuma, slamming his hand down on Barok's desk with enough force to rattle his wine glass, "there's no hope for the courts of this country."

"You don't mean that," said Barok, almost instinctively. After all, hadn't Kazuma been the one to drag him back to the courts when he'd been ready to flee to the Continent in the wake of his trial because, despite everything, he thought that there was a better future for all of them – for Barok, for the judiciary, for himself – if they worked for it? In his own way, Kazuma believed that just as much as Mr Naruhodo had, and Barok needed him to believe it, so that he could believe it himself. Because if he didn't, then what had it all been for?

He needed to make it mean something, that Mr Naruhodo had saved him from a guilty verdict that he both did and didn't deserve. He needed to make it worth it, the justice his brother had died for – the justice his brother had killed for.

"No," said Kazuma, inclining his head as he conceded the point, "but you can't tell me it doesn't get to you, too."

"It does," said Barok. "You know it does." The shadow of the Reaper still fell heavily over his shoulders, a cloak that he couldn't shrug off. He'd left the courts to escape it, but really what he'd been trying to escape was the creeping feeling that he didn't mind it as much as he wanted to, that at least when the Reaper struck it meant one fewer rich bastard escaping punishment for the harm they'd caused.

He'd thought, in the back of his mind and the depths of his heart, that it had been Klint's ghost, watching over him and finishing the job when he couldn't. In retrospect, he'd been almost right about that, in the worst way imaginable.

Kazuma shook his head, not in disagreement but in disgust. "Damn Amberley. Sometimes it's hard to remember why I even bother with this. It would be so much simpler to just–" He cut himself off, hand clutching the hilt of his sword. Not Karuma, the sword his father had

carried before him, the sword that he'd sent back to Japan with his best friend, but the sword that Barok had given him when he'd first become Barok's apprentice, before he had even known his own name, so that he could protect himself from the consequences of standing too close to the man everyone thought to be the Reaper.

Like most things that were now Barok's, it had been Klint's sword once, half of a pair of duelling swords. Barok carried the other, and both had been used in that last fatal duel. He'd asked Kazuma once, shortly after Mr Naruhodo's departure, if he wanted a different sword, one that his father hadn't used to kill a man – though not in so many words – but Kazuma had brushed him off, had insisted that it was just a weapon and nothing more.

Coming from the man who referred to Karuma as his soul, that wasn't entirely believable, but Barok had let it slide. He didn't really want to have that conversation either.

"It wouldn't be simpler," said Barok, glancing involuntarily at Klint's portrait on the wall. "Not in the long run."

"I know," said Kazuma. In the flickering light of the gas lamps, the wine staining his lips was as dark as blood. "But sometimes I wish it were."

Barok thought – reading between the lines of Klint's confession with everything he understood of what his brother believed in – that he had known he wouldn't have been judged fairly if he'd stood trial; he had known that the same loopholes through which his earliest victims and, later, the Reaper's, had escaped would have opened for him as well. In some ways, it was easier for Barok to accept that as an explanation for why Klint had chosen to die as he did. It didn't make Barok feel nearly as miserable as the thought that Klint had done it to save Barok from the stain that would've fallen on his reputation as well. Especially now that Barok had rendered it meaningless by letting the truth be revealed anyway.

No matter how badly he wished it had never come to that, he could respect Klint for sticking to his principles, for refusing to let his privilege shield him from the consequences of his actions.

There would be no such leniency for Kazuma. If he took matters into his own hands, on this case or any other that was just as frustrating and just as unfair, it wouldn't matter how justified he was; there would be no protecting him.

He would have balked at the idea of being under Barok's protection, but Barok had already failed Klint, and he'd failed Genshin Asogi, and he didn't want to fail anyone else.

"Believe me," said Barok, "I do understand the temptation."

"Ha," Kazuma said, his laugh dry and humourless. "I thought you might. Now pass me that book on import tariffs. If I can't get him convicted of the murder, I might as well get him for tax evasion."

Barok handed him the requested book and began to flip through some of the other files Kazuma had brought: coroner's report, expenses from the suspect's estate, a list of potential witnesses with most of the names crossed out and heavily editorialised in Inspector Lestrade's... distinctive handwriting.

He wondered how Klint would've tackled it, and it was disconcerting to realise that he didn't know. He liked to think that Klint had taught him everything he knew. He liked to think that he was here in the courts, in this office, in the world in Klint's place. But he was the prosecutor he was now not just because of Klint's tutelage, but also because of everything he'd lived through in the intervening years. It was strange, to have lived so many years thinking of himself as the shadow of a ghost, only to realise that he was his own man after all.

"Wait a minute," said Kazuma. "I've got it! I've found the contradiction, I know how I'm going to win." He shoved his notes even further onto Barok's side of the desk, stabbing his finger at the contradiction he'd found: a discrepancy between Amberley's initial statement and, of all things, a newspaper clipping describing the weather that evening. It was tenuous, but if Kazuma could press his advantage when he had him on the witness stand, it might just be enough.

Kazuma raised his chin proudly, as if daring Barok to find a flaw in his argument, but Barok just nodded and said, "I think you're right." What Barok didn't say was that he thought his father, a keen investigator in his own right, would've been proud of him. It would've been an unwelcome remark coming from him of all people – both because of his role in Mr Asogi's death, and because of the reminder that he'd known Kazuma's father for almost as many years as Kazuma himself – but he knew it to be true.

He couldn't quite bring himself to decide if Klint would have been proud of him, but he thought Klint would've liked Kazuma. It was strange, how much of Kazuma's life had been shaped – for better or, more likely, for worse – by a man he could never meet. But he wished they had been able to meet, or, failing that, that there was any way for Barok to compare the two of them that Kazuma would take as a compliment. Klint had always thought that the courts could be better, where ideas like fairness and truth meant something; and now here was Kazuma, just as determined as Klint had ever been to see real justice done.

Barok just had to pray that determination didn't break him as it had broken Klint.

Still, Barok allowed himself to feel cautiously optimistic, listening to Kazuma plan out how he would bring Amberley to justice, his earlier frustration set aside entirely. It was, after all, possible that they could learn from the past without repeating it; perhaps they could fulfil Klint's dream of changing the judiciary for the better.

He poured himself another glass of wine and raised it to his mouth with a silent toast. As he looked up at his brother's portrait, a trick of the light made it almost look like he was smiling.

The End

Underpainting

Written by Emily
Illustrated by elisa

tags: psychological manipulation/gaslighting

Lord Klint van Zieks had been a tall man, but never a well-built one. Gangly in a delicate fashion that had put Mael in mind of a young Abraham Lincoln whenever he wore a tall hat. Looking up at the sketch, Mael can tell that the painter has intentions of generosity. Though not by much –there's only so generous a painter can be before the subject becomes unrecognisable.

Mael has chosen his portraitist well. A bit of extra muscle, extra presence, is perhaps a clever call. Unrecognisability defeats the purpose.

From the foot of the artist's ladder, he inspects the beginnings of Klint van Zieks. Eight feet tall and pre-rendered in shades of lean sepia. Posed nobly, like a conquering hero, amid foliage and crumbling columns – a man who had never existed in a place that had never existed either. A construction. A painted doll in a model room, a still life more than a portrait.

It's *perfect*. There's just enough of him to strike that vital chord in his brother's heart, and not a bit more. It's not the man himself, after all, that Mael had ever intended to portray, but a posthumous collage of the best of him. A glittering sheen of him, a saint remembered falsely in death. That's what Barok needs to look up to right now. He needs to internalise it, smooth it over the top of his own memories. He needs to forget his brother as he'd truly been.

Mael won't say *well done*, not when nothing's been done yet. He taps the ladder with the head of his cane. "Carry on."

"Yes, sir."

And then he clasps his cane in his hands behind him, and he takes a few ponderous steps back. He needs to: not many things tower over Mael Stronghart, but this canvas stands as high as the office ceiling where it's to hang.

He gazes up into Van Zieks's shadowed face.

He's arrested for a moment by the look on it. Some of the painting may be pure invention, but this expression had been *his*. The sharp eyes, the drawn, arched brow. The haunted, distant anger. It's been captured impeccably even in the monochrome. The emotion in it colours the portrait entirely.

A newspaper from three years ago is pinned near the top of the canvas – Barok's. Since childhood he'd kept every mention of his brother in print. It was the closest thing to documentation that Mael could find of this face that he'd seen Van Zieks wear so often, this expression he'd requested specifically. A photograph snapped of the defeated prosecutor out front the Old Bailey, after a crafty extortioner had walked out a free man.

How do you stand it? Van Zieks had asked Mael in the hours afterward, drunk on Scotch whiskey in his lamplit office. *All these years you've been prosecuting... When you do everything right, and even **still**...*

Mael had considered this, looking down into his own full glass. *Faith*, he said eventually.

Van Zieks laughed. A bitter bark. *In God?*

No.

The law?

No, Mael had said. *In myself. That, in time, I will find a way.*

And everyone who's hurt? asked Van Zieks, after a long, heavy pause. *In the time that it takes?*

True progress cannot be rushed: this was a lesson Van Zieks had never learnt. Mael had shaken his head.

Avenged, he'd said.

It was around that time that Van Zieks had truly begun to understand his powerlessness within the confines of the law. Around that time Mael had almost had hope for him. He'd seen the shining young golden boy tarnish and dull over the years. Seen his eyes darken into the sorrowful, vengeful pair that overlooks them now. He'd thought, perhaps, that Klint van Zieks could have handled what it took to change things.

He'd been proven grievously wrong.

It's the Klint van Zieks of those more promising years that Mael needs to capture. The look that he'd worn then is the one that needs to be immortalised. Barok will look up into this face every single day. In those eyes he will see his brother's dream unfulfilled, and he'll be inspired all the more to soldier on.

Mael turns and glances toward the back of the room. Barok van Zieks stands there, a look not unlike his painted brother's on his sharp, pale face.

Barok does not move as Mael strides over, doesn't even turn at the slap of his soles on the stone. He doesn't look over as he stands at his side.

"You've been spending a great deal of time here," Mael says. "Overseeing?"

Gregson has been keeping tabs on Barok's movements for him. Mael hadn't hoped for such measures to be necessary, but Barok van Zieks is not a well man. Though rage had carried him through Asogi's trial, it had only been able to carry him so far beyond: in recent months, he's been walking about half-dead. Unsuitable for the Reaper of the Bailey – unsuitable for London. Looking at him now, Mael knows he should have foreseen this. He had engineered the Reaper's mythos such that Klint van Zieks and his yearning for justice lay at the root of it, in a way so fundamental that he hadn't believed it possible for Barok to ignore, however... he'd underestimated the fundamental melancholy at the root of Barok's being.

A visual reminder might be more effective. Mael hopes it will be. He would hate to resort to more forceful methods of control. It's a far less certain game, and far more exhausting. He has a great deal to be getting on with as the Lord Chief Justice, after all – he can't be spending all his time making sure Barok van Zieks does what he needs to.

Perhaps his brother can do that for him.

"I wouldn't call it *overseeing*," says Barok quietly.

"It's only natural that you would," Mael says. "It's a perilous thing, is it not, to put something so important in another's hands?"

"... Yes. I suppose."

"Are you pleased, thus far?"

"Yes," says Barok. He still cannot look away from the canvas. "He's very talented. The Thorndyke Academy trains their students well."

A more prestigious artist could have easily been found elsewhere, but they'd agreed a bit of patriotism felt appropriate. "They do."

"The depiction is acceptable?"

"More than acceptable."

"And yet you're conflicted."

Barok's lips flatten together, reluctant. "... On the painting itself? Not at all."

"And otherwise?"

He sighs. His eyes leave the painting for the first time as he turns his face away. "It's so *grand*, Lord Stronghart.... It's – it's what he deserves. But do you really think it appropriate, sir? For the office?"

"Whyever wouldn't it be?"

"... Are you sure it's in good taste?"

"Good taste?" Mael turns to him, brows raised. "To honour your brother, in the office where you carry on his mission? I could hardly think of better."

"In any other man's office, perhaps...," Barok replies. "But the Reaper of the Bailey's?"

... Ah. "I see."

"You've *heard* the whispers, sir."

The plan had fallen into his lap nearly complete. Mael had never been a believer in fate, but the stars had aligned over the Reaper so neatly that it had felt perfect, intentional – *meaningful*. A spectre was a far more untroubled assassin, a grieving brother a far more obedient figurehead. The death of Klint van Zieks had been the missing piece.

He shakes his head. He must maintain skepticism. "Ghost stories," he says. "Nothing more."

Of course, Mael knows that Barok won't believe him, not truly. Everything has always hinged on that. But he must also give Barok something to disbelieve, as he gives him something more hopeful to believe in. Lord knows that's just as motivating.

"... Be that as it may," says Barok, "are we not beholden to the public?" He swallows, takes a moment to summon his words. "Perhaps to us, my brother died a hero, but to London.... He *haunts* them, sir."

Quietly, Mael sighs.

"Is it not... *uncouth*?" Barok asks. "To memorialise him so grandly, in such a place?"

"Lord van Zieks," says Mael after a long moment. "You prosecute to serve the people of London, in the way that you know they must be served. But that does not mean that their inane gossip must be paid attention to."

"I simply don't wish to appear as if I mock the idea."

"The idea that they mock his memory with?" Mael scoffs softly. He looks down at Barok's face, still bent away. "Do not let your brother be reduced to a bogeyman, Lord van Zieks."

Barok pauses. He lifts his head, turns his face up to him.

Mael looks back deeply into his sunken eyes.

"No man in a hundred years has done more for the law in London," he says, slowly, firmly. "Lord Klint van Zieks was a great man who fell in the line of duty, and now it falls to those of us who truly knew him to preserve his memory."

Barok closes his eyes for a moment, then looks back up to his brother.

"... It *is* what he would want of me," he says. His voice is thin. Weary. "To... remain strong. To do what I must."

Mael watches him for a moment longer.

Barok van Zieks did not know his brother at all. Barok had known his brother as Van Zieks had *wished* he'd been – the brother he had allowed Barok to know. That brother would have wanted this of him. But Mael had *known* him, and he knows that such a cold pursuit of justice is the last thing Klint van Zieks would have wanted for Barok. That his greatest wish for his brother had been to never discover the path he'd walked, and certainly for him never to follow it. Never to lengthen it himself. Never to accept its lengthening.

It had been the only thing Van Zieks had asked of Mael. The man had been at his mercy, and all he had cared for was his family's admiration. To betray the image he'd created for his brother would have been worse than arrest, than trial, than execution.

Mael looks up to him again, and he can barely see that desperation in paint.

In a way, the image that Van Zieks himself had created for Barok and this image that Mael has begun creating are nearly indistinguishable. Both bright and shining, noble, hopeful, guiltless. Both born of a desire to guide Barok's future down a preferred path. Mael and Van Zieks had both seen his devotion, and they had both understood that he would become whichever idol was presented to him. They'd seen that same opportunity.

But Van Zieks's false self had been created from a place of shame, and Mael's false reflection of him from a place of hope. Of *faith*, like he had told Van Zieks so long ago. Faith that Barok van Zieks can do what his brother – living, anyways – could not. Could never do.

What have I ***done*** *to you?* he had asked near the end. Begged, on his knees. Not in Mael's old office where they'd spoken all those years before, but the new one that his actions had handed him.

Done? Mael had replied. *You've done nothing to me.*

Then – my God, ***why****...*

Mael had reached out to rest a hand on Van Zieks's trembling back, had looked down into his furious, flaming eyes. *It's what you can do* ***for*** *me, Lord van Zieks*, he said. *For yourself. For all of us.*

Van Zieks had spat at him.

Mael had lifted his handkerchief and wiped it away without a word.

He rests his hand now at Barok's back. It's a gesture Van Zieks might have set his dog on him for, but neither he nor his dog remain to take issue. Lord Klint van Zieks remains only in the forms that Mael has built him.

As the painter begins to lay down the first strokes of colour, the shadows around Van Zieks's triumphant feet, they watch together in silence.

It's glorious, the memory that Mael Stronghart has made for him. The sort of legacy any number of more deserving men could only hope for. He's a martyr, an angel, a soldier and a symbol, when in life he had been little more than a coward. In death... in death he can do more good than he ever could have done alive. Death frees him from the heart that had held him back.

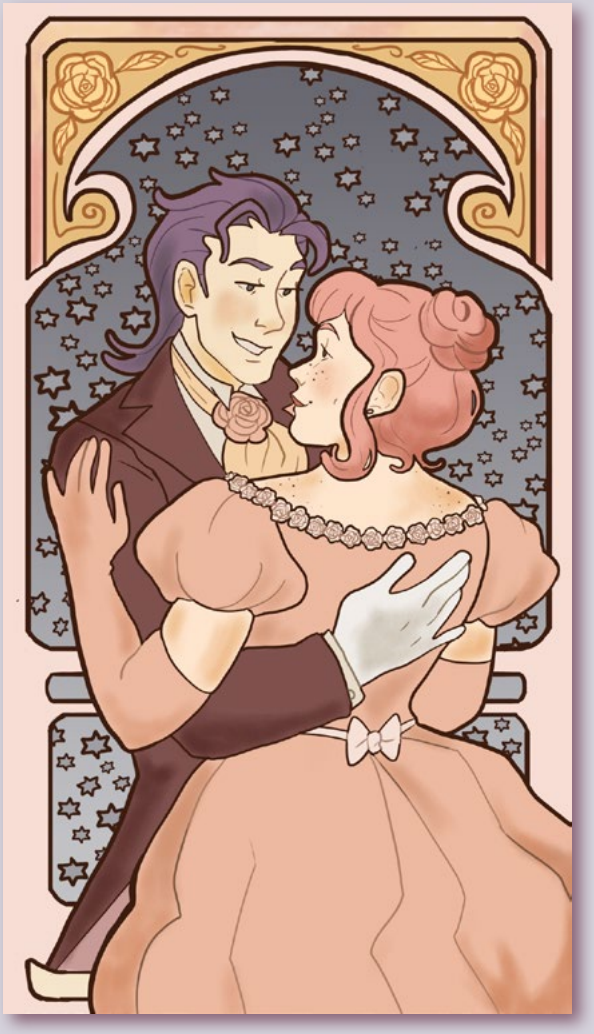
As Mael looks up to him, he can't help but feel generous. Benevolent. Everything he's done has been an unearned courtesy to the man who'd failed London. A gift to him. But – more profoundly than that, a gift to his brother. Through his brother, a gift to the people.

Mael opens his watch and takes a glance from the corner of his eye.

"Come," he says, low-voiced in Barok's ear. "I think you've spent enough time here today."

The End

Merchandise



Mobile Wallpaper
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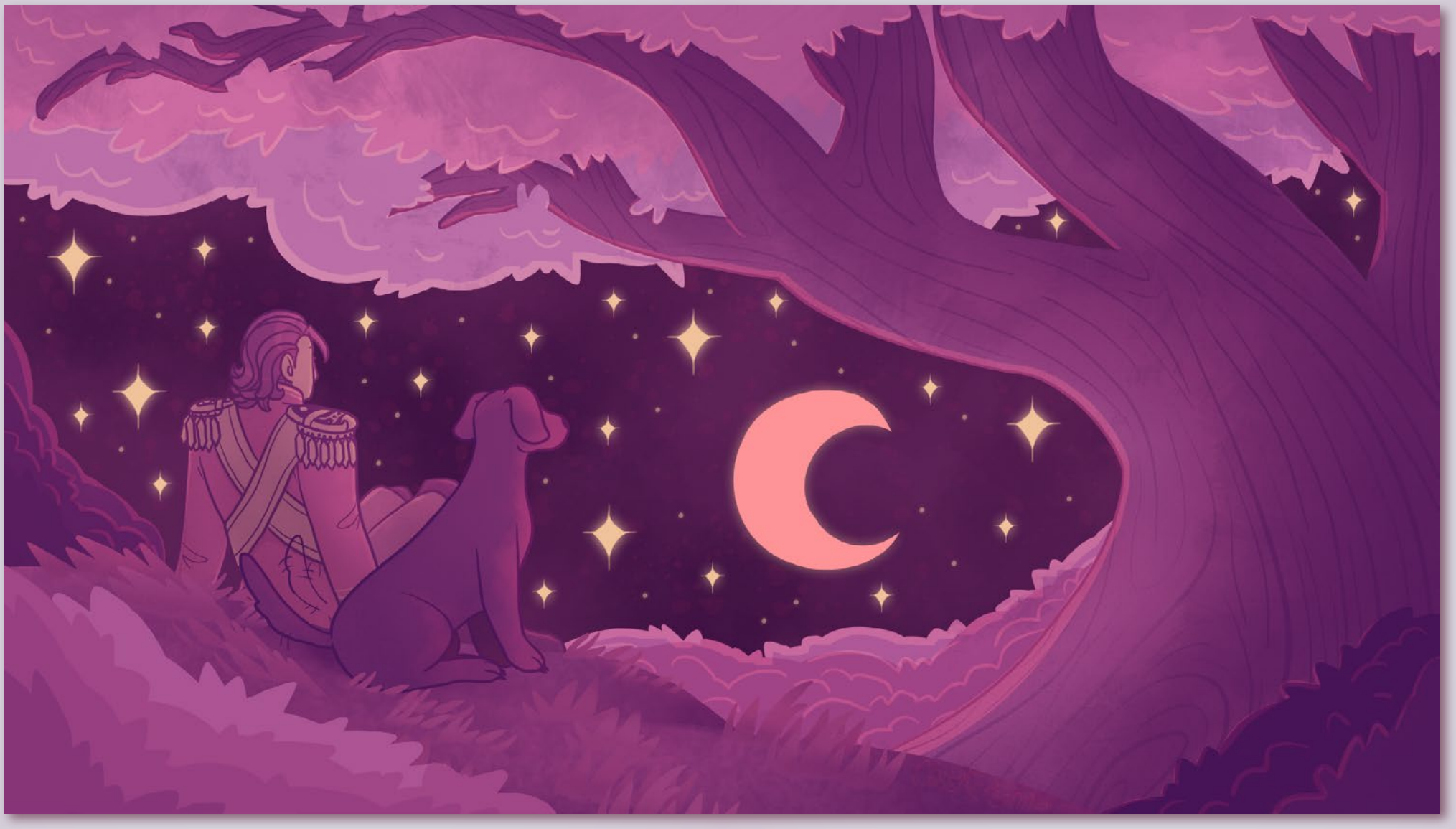
MERCH SHOWCASE



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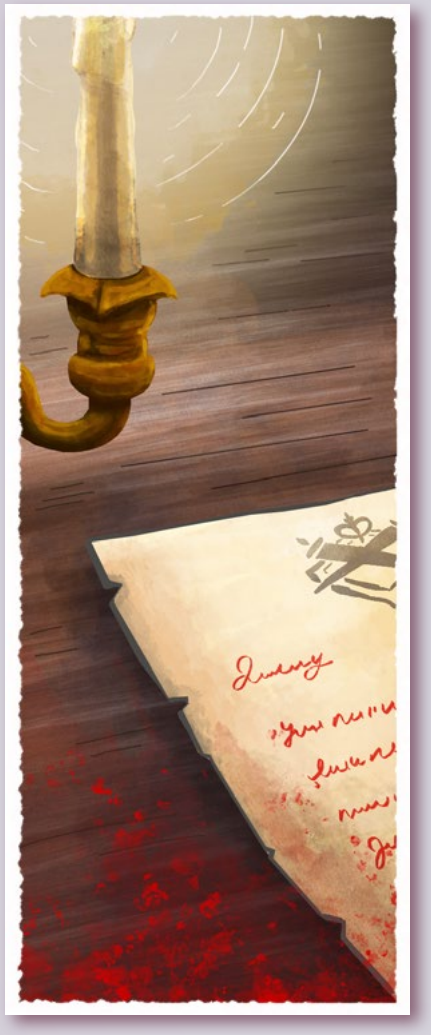

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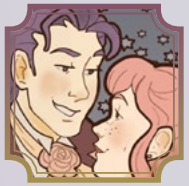

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